

THE MANAPOURI PETITION

Nearly twenty-five thousand persons signed the Society's petition to Parliament praying that Lakes Te Anau and Manapouri be saved from despoliation and that the National Parks Act be amended to give greater security to New Zealand's magnificent national parks. On Wednesday, 31 August, the Lands Committee of the House sat to hear submissions on the petition: the hearing concluded on Wednesday, 7 September, at noon. Submissions were presented by the Society's President and Executive members, by the New Zealand Scenery Preservation Society, by Dr. J. T. Salmon, Dr. Gerald Fitzgerald, Mr. Harry Cochran, and Mr. Wilson C. Campbell. The various Government departments concerned submitted reports. The committee gave to those taking part a courteous and attentive hearing, but it was faced with a difficult task in being asked to recommend the repudiation of an agreement already signed by the Government, however wrongly. It is not surprising therefore, that, notwithstanding the volume of evidence submitted, at a sitting of the House two hours after the conclusion of the hearing, the Select Committee reported it had no recommendation to make, although it added a rider that the scenic value of the lakes should be protected as far as possible. Nearly the whole of the afternoon was taken up in hearing addresses by Members on the petition, and, in accordance with custom, when no decision has been reached by the House at the tea adjournment, the petition is considered to be "talked out", that is, it lapses, and no further action will be taken. The Prime Minister can, however, direct that the question be reintroduced, and we understand that our petition and Mr. Gerard's motion that the matter be referred back to the Lands Committee for further consideration, has again appeared on the order paper of the House as we go to press.

The same evening the second reading of the Manapouri Agreement Validating Bill commenced and was concluded the following afternoon. During the addresses it became apparent that an overwhelming majority of the Members favoured the plans for an aluminium industry, but a number of them expressed considerable dissatisfaction that the

Government had not taken the House into its confidence before the agreement was signed, and some said they were perturbed that no clauses had been inserted in the agreement binding the company to preserve the scenic qualities of the lakes.

In opening the submissions our President said that the members of the Society recognised and sympathised with the need for developing secondary industries in New Zealand, but we had to oppose the proposals in this case because they violated the National Parks Act and established a dangerous precedent.

Mr. P. M. Henderson, Senior Lecturer in Civil Engineering in the University of Canterbury, submitted evidence to prove that the lakes could be used to produce the necessary power without interfering with the level of Lake Manapouri, and with very little interference with Lake Te Anau.

Professor H. R. Gray, Dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of Canterbury, gave evidence that there was really no legal obligation in the agreement binding the company to respect the scenic qualities of the lakes. He submitted that clause 22, and the extracts from correspondence appearing in the schedule of the agreement, purporting to show the intentions of the parties in relation to the preservation of the scenic qualities of the lakes and rivers, are of no value whatsoever in obliging the company to take any steps towards that end, and, he added, "It is submitted therefore that this clause has been intended to create the appearance of obligation without the reality; on any other interpretation it is meaningless".

We had to protest against the agreement with the Consolidated Zinc Corporation because it created a precedent of tremendous importance involving a violation of the spirit and the letter of the National Parks Act. Can any reasonable person doubt that had Parliament been able to discuss the agreement before it was signed it would have contained provisions safeguarding the scenic qualities of the lakes and that, moreover, a precedent fraught with immense danger to the future security of our great national parks would have been avoided?